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THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION

THE

CHRISTIAN RELIGION

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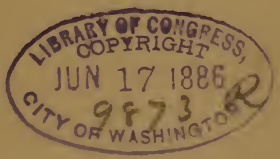

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THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

I SHALL not enter the lists as a combatant against any of the recent assailants of the Christian Religion. Religious controversy is sometimes necessary: it is often useful; but it is always exposed to disadvantages. It is very apt to draw about it a multitude of readers whose interest in it is akin to that which animates the spectators of a cock-fight. It easily degenerates into a game of fence, where the vivacity and expertness of the competitors in the duel are of more consequence than the justice of the cause. Christianity is a large matter; the Bible is a large book, or rather collection of books forming a connected whole. It is easy for an ingenious mind to bring forward objections, suggest difficulties of greater or less weight, and propound mistaken or

Religious controversy.

half-mistaken assertions. Of all warfare, guerilla-fighting is the least satisfactory. It is proverbial that a question respecting any system, however well founded, may be asked in one line, which it may require pages to answer. To reply to a medley of such objections one by one is like the business of picking up pins; and, even when the work is really done, the impression left is that made by an apology, according to the fine old maxim, "*Qui s'excuse s'accuse.*"[1] Most of the popular objections are not in the least novel. A critical attack, peculiar in its character, has been made on Christianity in recent times in Germany by Strauss and Baur. It has been renewed in France in a modified form by Renan. Materialism, either in a bald shape or in its agnostic dress, has made itself a prominent antagonist. But assailants of Christianity in American journals frequently take up last-century weapons which have been cast aside by adversaries of the gospel who are abreast of the times. To

Old objections renewed.

[1] He who excuses himself accuses himself.

confute attacks of this sort, such as were common in the old deistical controversy, would be to beat straw already well thrashed. In truth, it is remarkable how many of these objections were made by Celsus as early as the close of the second century,—for example, the objection from alleged discrepancies in the Gospels,—and were successfully disposed of by Origen, the great Christian scholar of that day.

I prefer a more positive method of handling the subject. As there is a variety of topics to be touched upon, it will be convenient to separate them by numerical designations.

1. Christianity is not a new thing. It is not contending for a foothold on the earth. Its roots are deep in the soil. It is a great, long-established, wide-spread, and still advancing religion. It is the faith of the enlightened nations, incorporated in them at the beginning of their existence, helping to create them, presiding over their growth. It has moulded to a great extent their political and social institutions, their sentiments and usages, and leavened their

Power and influence of Christianity.

literature and laws. It has entered into their very blood and marrow. To dislodge Christianity as a supernatural religion, were it possible, from the convictions and life of the European nations and their offshoots, would be a revolution the magnitude and terrible effect of which, as I believe, it is impossible to conceive. The old Græco-Roman religion fell, but it fell by the expulsive power of a new and better faith. Had it been swept away by mere unbelief, with nothing but atheism, or the indistinct and fluctuating creed of natural religion, to stand in the room of it, who can doubt that there would have been a ruin without a recovery? But the principal thing which I wish to say under this head is, that the burden of disproving Christianity and demonstrating that it rests on a false foundation properly falls on the assailing party; and, further, to intimate that the task is not a light one.

Mysteries in Christianity.

2. It should be understood, at the outset, that no one claims that the system of Christianity is free from difficulties, which may, here and there, be of a perplexing character. This is no more than is admitted by everybody,

except narrow partisans, in the case of every science. The same thing is true, I believe, of the law of gravitation. There are mysteries which are not cleared up, which revelation does not pretend to clear up,—some, it is likely, which the human intelligence, at its present grade of development, is incapable of exploring. We are not yet arrived at the summit where we can overlook the universe. Christianity is a practical system: its founder likened himself to a physician. We are justified in taking food, and in taking medicine when we are sick, and this not merely on grounds of experience. We can see to some extent the *rationale* of the operation of food and medicine, even without an exhaustive knowledge of chemistry and physiology, and the hidden process of life and growth. An apostle only claimed for himself and others to "know in part," to have a fragmentary and obscure knowledge—but still a real knowledge—of things invisible. The question respecting any creed proposed for belief, whether in religion or philosophy or science, is whether the reasons for it are stronger than the reasons against

it, and whether they are enough stronger to justify credence. Christianity asks no more for itself than is conceded in regard to every other system and theory, and in regard generally to events which do not fall under the immediate notice of the senses; though even here time and space, sense-perception, and the reality of an external world are not free from the most perplexing difficulties.

3. Another thing which may as well be said here is, that Christians are not all agreed in their opinions, that it is unreasonable to expect them to concur on all points, and that it is unfair to identify the special ideas of a class with the essentials of Christian belief. What master in philosophy was ever interpreted just alike by all of his adherents? The disciples of Plato have differed as to his meaning on particular points. One of them has maintained one thing, and another the opposite. Some have denied certain Dialogues to be his, which others with equal confidence have declared to be genuine. Yet there is an essential Platonism in which, as a body, Platonic disciples are agreed. Where is

Differences among Christians.

there a political party which has existed for a score of years, the members of which are perfectly at one in their creed? How commonly do they disagree as to the meaning of their "platform," and this when there is no designed ambiguity in it! It would be too much to expect that on a subject like Christianity, covering, as it does, so broad a field, and as to the precise character of the Bible as a whole, and of its component parts, there should be an absolute accord among all who call themselves, and deserve to be called, Christians. To take a single example: there are some who hold that every thing that is said in the Scriptures which bears on natural and physical science is correct, and of divine authority. There are others who hold that the biblical writers, whatever they knew of the physical world, accommodated their language to the science of their time. Others, again, hold that in the Bible are positive errors in science, which, however, are affirmed, not to militate against its authority as a teacher of moral and religious truth. These last are not to be denied the name of Christians: the fundamental principles of super-

natural Christianity they may cherish with all their hearts. It is a blunder of ignorance, or a trick of controversy, to refuse to discriminate between what is essential to a system and the diverse opinions, on points not essential, which spring up among its adherents. The line of demarcation it may not be so easy to draw. There may be a difference as to where exactly it should run; but the existence of such a line none but a sophistical reasoner will ignore.

Is religion baneful?

4. Before proceeding farther, it is well to advert to an idea which I had formerly supposed was nearly extinct in the world,—the idea, namely, that religion, and the Christian religion in particular, is a bane. The Epicureans thought it an advantage to have deities which stood aloof from all concern for men or connection with human affairs. Lucretius wrote a poem to set forth the atomic theory of the universe, and thus to deliver men's minds from the terrors of superstition and all the gloom and torture of soul of which religion was the occasion. It cannot be denied that religion has been the occasion of incalculable suffer-

ing. Think of the uncounted victims of religious intolerance! Think of the animosity and bloodshed caused by religious wars! What an amount of misery arose out of the European wars of the seventeenth century, which had their origin largely in religious dissension! It seems a quick way to abolish these manifold calamities to abolish religion itself. Does it need to be said that there is another side to the picture? Apart from the fallacy of charging on a feeling or principle the consequences of its abuse or perversion, one should look at the comfort, wholesome restraint, uplifting hope, and all the other purifying, elevating, beneficial influences, incalculable in their extent, which have gone forth to the individual, to the household, to the state, and to mankind at large, from religion in its purer forms. Moreover, one should look at the state of things which would ensue if religion, and the Christian religion, were swept away, and men were left to be born, and toil and live and die, "having no hope, and without God in the world." This way of arguing against religion as baneful really contains an argument *for* religion. The evil

that has sprung from fanaticism and other abuses of the religious sentiment shows how deeply planted religion is in the constitution of human nature, how powerful and ineradicable a feeling it is. In no other way can we account for its tremendous influence, when unenlightened or morbid, for evil. Why not go for getting rid of the nervous system on account of sciatica and neuralgia? Apply the same sort of reasoning which is used against religion to the passion of love as between the sexes. Who can measure the agony of which it has been the occasion,—the corroding jealousies, the frantic rage, abiding rancor, adulteries, self-murder, sanguinary wars, from the siege of Troy for the capture of Helen to the connection of Mark Antony and Cleopatra, and from the epoch of the Egyptian sorceress down to our day? Remembering Pascal's remark, that, if Cleopatra's nose had been longer or shorter, the course of history would have been changed, I am tempted to turn aside, and show what unutterable woe would have been spared to mankind if "the fatal gift" of beauty had not been given to woman or to man. But, not to leave our

illustration, if love had been absent, and the sensibilities and propensities involved in it, none can doubt that frightful sorrows would have been avoided. But then, among other things, we should have missed the family! To argue that religion is a curse is like contending that domestic life and human government are a curse. If the family had not existed, or were to be abolished, an unmeasured amount of petty tyranny, grinding toil, anguish at bereavement, would not have been, and would be no more. Then, as to human government, what is it but a long record of oppression? The cruel deeds of tyrants,—of the Pharaohs, the Neros, the Napoleons, the ravaging wars which rulers have instigated, the dynastic struggles,—were they all written down, the world would not contain the books. Yet, is human government a bane?

What is there bad in religion? Religion is love to God and men! What more is required by religion but "to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God"? (Micah vi. 8.) This is religion even according to an Old-Testament definition. Is this harm-

Nothing harmful in Religion.

ful to the individual who practises it? Is it hurtful to a neighborhood or to a civil community? Would it be bad for farmers, merchants, artisans, for young people or old people, or any other class? Are penitence for evil-doing, trust in a heavenly Father who is more willing to bless than is an earthly parent, the conforming of one's life to the purest Example, in which righteousness and love are perfect and perfectly blended, mischievous? Is it mischievous to resist temptation, and to pray to God for help in the conflict, and for aid in becoming unselfish? Yet these are essential ingredients in practical Christianity, and Christianity has nothing in it incompatible with them; but every thing else in Christianity is auxiliary to them.

Benefits of Christianity

I must confess myself amazed that any rational person can read history with the least attention, and fail to see the beneficent influence of the Christian religion. To vindicate Christianity in this particular appears very like pronouncing a eulogy upon the sun in answer to the assertion that there was light—"cosmic light"—in the world before the sun first rose in the

heavens, and in order to rebut the complaint that the sun has been sometimes clouded, and gives us, not unfrequently, dull and murky days. What was the world into which Christianity entered? Tribes and nations had been distinct, each of them shut up in its own boundaries, and going forth only to make war on its neighbors. Then all were subdued, and reduced under the hard domination of one city. Liberty—such as had existed in Greek towns where there was a little fraction of freemen to a multitude of slaves, and in Rome within the oligarchy which ruled it—had disappeared. As concerns morality, Roman slavery, the slavery of whites,—of artists, teachers, and authors, as well as of peasants,—which was bad enough under the Republic, grew worse after its fall; gladiatorial combats, where all classes of people applauded the butchery of men by thousands in the arena; infanticide, countenanced by philosophers and statesmen; the foulest sorts of pollution, to which modern society is a stranger,—these are some of the features of social life at that epoch. The picture of ancient morals and manners has

State of the Ancient World.

been sometimes drawn in colors too black, and without due discrimination; but when faithfully drawn it justifies the condemnation which the Apostle Paul pours upon it in the introduction of his Letter to the Roman Church.[1] There were noble men in antiquity, and there were virtuous women. But when one hears laudations of ancient morals, as if there was a state of things to be compared for a moment with the pure atmosphere of Christian society, one can hardly avoid reminding the authors of such false and ignorant comparisons that the noblest man of all the ancients went with his disciples to visit a prostitute, not to advise her "to sin no more," but to talk on the question how to ply her occupation with most profit.[2] Considering what Greek life was, Socrates deserves no severe reproach. But this verdict in his favor condemns the society where even the best of its members knew no better.

Neither Socrates nor Plato rose above the Greek

[1] I have endeavored to describe the morals of heathen society in "The Beginnings of Christianity," ch. vi.

[2] Xenophon: "Memorabilia," II., xi.

prejudice against "the barbarian." There came, indeed, at length, a dawning sense of a humanity not limited by barriers of nation and race. Yet utterances of this nature are heard chiefly from the Stoic sect,—a sect which purchased tranquillity at the cost of sympathy, and, by smothering emotion, indulged in compassion only in contradiction to its own fundamental tenets, and preached fatalism and the drifting of all things to destruction as the best gospel it could discover. If Terence wrote a line in praise of humane feeling, Plautus declared that "man is a wolf to the stranger,"—"*Homo homini ignoto lupus est.*" The only Roman writer who expresses a disapproval of gladiatorial fights is Seneca, and he only in his old age, after he had implied in earlier writings a contrary view. Even the younger Pliny applauds the provisions made by a private person, as well as by Trajan, for these bloody amusements.[1]

Lack of humane Feeling.

[1] See Friedländer's comments on Cicero's view, etc., in the "Sittengesch. Roms," I., 242, 243; and Göll, "Hellas u. Rom," 158, 159.

Charity, compassionate love, says Boeckh, one of the profoundest classical scholars of the present age, was no virtue of the ancient world. Kindly sayings can be met with, as blossoms are found on the high Alps in the midst of the snow. There are instances of philanthropy in something approaching to a systematic form. But it takes more than one swallow to make a spring. The few examples of benevolence on a broad scale, which are often referred to, are generally more apparent than real. The provision for poor children and for orphans, begun by Nerva and carried out by Trajan, was for the increase of the free population, just as Augustus had offered a bounty on marriage. The number of boys supported was ten times that of girls, which indicates that female children were in large numbers abandoned, either to perish or to be saved from death for a worse lot. Children deserted by their parents were reared by a special class of slave-dealers, in order to sell them as slaves.[1] Measures which

Restrictions of charity

[1] See Merivale: "History of the Romans," vii., 208, 209.

were founded on policy—as much so as the feeding of the idle populace of Rome out of the public granary—are not to be construed into evidences of benevolence. The motive of the benefaction of Trajan is shown in the fact that it made no provision for children thus abandoned to perish. The same "mild" Trajan,—and he *was* mild in comparison with many of the emperors,—after his victories on the Danube, put ten thousand men into the arena, who continued for four months to soak the sand with their blood.[1] The truth is, that among the Jews alone the spirit of fraternity and charity prevailed. The Jew alone left in his field the sheaf of grain for the gleaner, and in the vineyard the bunch of grapes for the needy. Aristotle and Plato were the philosophers of widest repute. Aristotle defends slavery on the ground that the slave is an animated tool. Plato discountenances an interest in the poor when they are sick. The laboring man who cannot recover, the physician is to abandon, or to experiment on. In all

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[1] Dio, LXVIII., 15.

antiquity the individual was merged in the state. When the states of antiquity fell the Stoic dreamed of a cosmopolitan state; but it remained a dream.

Christianity came into the world with a new commandment, to "love one another." It brought in the principle of the brotherhood of man. It broke down the barriers of country and clan. It gathered the Greek and barbarian, the rich and the poor, the freeman and the slave, about the Lord's table, where all differences were merged in a fraternal unity. The Christian churches were eleemosynary societies. They dispensed alms with an open hand to their own poor, and to the needy about them. There had been sodalities for mutual benefit,—mutual insurance clubs; but such beneficence and self-sacrifice as Christians showed were something altogether new in the world. The indigent, the oppressed, the desponding invalid, the toiling slave, took heart and hope. There was sympathy for them here on earth, and a bright hope beyond death.

Beneficence of Christians.

Christianity survived persecution. It was stronger than Rome, stronger than pagan fan-

aticism. It displaced the old religion. Amidst the decay of all to which the hearts of men had clung, Christianity remained the sole stay and hope of a falling world. The Church turned to the Germanic nations, carried to them the gospel, reduced their languages to writing, gave them the Bible and a literature, civilized them, conveyed to them such learning and such of the arts of life as had outlived the tides of barbarian invasion. The oldest writings in the Teutonic tongues are the fragments of the Gothic translation of the Bible by Ulfilas. As he gave letters to the Goths, another missionary, Cyril, did the same service for the Slavonic peoples. Anglo-Saxon literature, with English civilization, grew up among our fierce barbarian ancestors through their conversion by Augustine, and the connection into which they were brought with the converted nations of the Continent. It is very doubtful whether the individuals of our Teutonic race who attack the Christian religion would know their letters, or would be possessed of any vehicle for expressing their ideas except in an oral form, had

Historic influence of Christianity.

it not been for the heroic missionaries of that religion which is thought to be so deleterious in its influence. In Christian monasteries the remains of ancient literature were preserved. By Christian monks barbarians were taught agriculture and whatever knowledge was left from the general wreck. From schools founded by British missionaries, and by Charlemagne (who was taught his letters by an English clergyman), the universities of Europe afterward arose. In the partial corruption of the Church, the Scriptures had still been preserved; the truth of the gospel had not been quenched. When the Bible was opened, out of the bosom of the Church came a great reformation. Religion in its purified form manifested its immortal power in the individual and for the renovation of society. From the awakening of the souls of men to a truer sense of their relations to God and to Christ, resulted in modern times the demand for political liberty and for institutions more conformed to justice. The struggle for English freedom ensued, and the events which paved the way for the American Republic.

I have not space to pursue this topic. The eccentric thesis that religion—that the Christian religion as it is set forth in the New Testament—is a curse may be tested in a practical way. Let any one imagine the best and most faithful Christian, measured by the New-Testament standard, whom he knows, to be deprived of his religion altogether, or even of such elements in it as are the exclusive result of the gospel, and then let him ask himself if his manhood would be improved by the change, and if his influence in the aggregate would be for the better. Then let the same person imagine the entire community to be stripped of the churches, hospitals, schools, the customs of private prayer and household religious teaching,—stripped, in a word, of all the beliefs, habits, feelings, institutions, laws, so far as their origin is due to the gospel of Christ as taught in the New Testament, and then let him inquire of himself whether the change would be salutary, or whether, in case the gospel had not borne these fruits, anything else equally desirable would have grown up in the

The effects of the Gospel tested.

room of them. Let him make up the account, putting in the column opposite to the benefits of Christianity whatever of evil he thinks has come from it, or would have been prevented without it. Let him make the calculation for himself, and render an honest verdict.

5. What is Christianity? It is composed of facts and doctrines, two elements which I shall severally consider hereafter. Christians believe in the supernatural mission of Jesus, in his divine sonship, in the authority of his teaching and of the teaching of his apostles, in his spotless excellence, in his miracles, in his death and resurrection. They believe that God has established a kingdom in the world, a spiritual kingdom, the beginnings of which were laid in the remote past; that it began in the separation of one man, Abraham, from the surrounding idolatry, and in the segregation from idolatrous peoples of the nation which sprang from him; that this kingdom, founded and sustained by a supernatural Providence, was carried from stage to stage until its consummation, or its attaining to a ripe and universal form, through Jesus Christ;

What is the Christian Faith?

that within this kingdom true religion was planted and nourished until it arrived at perfection in the final or Christian stage of revelation, when it only remained to diffuse it over the earth; that to this outcome the whole system, even in its rudimental shape, looked and tended; and that Christianity was the object of prediction, sometimes dim, sometimes more clear; that the manifestation of God was primarily in act and deed, or in a succession of historical events in which the divine agency was evidently concerned, and which served, therefore, to reveal God and to bring men into communion with him; that for the understanding of the significance of these transactions the minds of prophets and apostles were supernaturally enlightened, whereby they were qualified to be the expositors of the outward revelation and to enforce its lessons.

A distinction must be made between revelation and inspiration, and between Christianity and the Bible. He is the recipient of a revelation to whom insight into truth is supernaturally communicated. The same man may, or may not, be inspired to set forth the contents of that

Revelation and Inspiration.

revelation either orally or in a writing. But Christianity existed and was complete, and it was preached, before a syllable of the New Testament was written. Christians hold to the obvious historical fact that the old dispensation stands in an organic relation to the new. Christianity sprang up among the Jews. If science is from the Greeks, and law is from the Romans, "salvation is of the Jews." Religion was the one absorbing idea and interest of that people as it never has been of any other. The Son of man is the Son of David. But a great part of the Bible is made up of narratives. How far were the writers aided from above in the composition of them, and how far did they depend on observations and inquiries like those through which writers of secular history, into which the miraculous element does not enter, gain their information? No one holds that history was to any considerable extent dictated to them. Some Christians hold that inspiration guided their minds in the selection and omission of matter. Some hold that inspiration protected them from all sorts of error, even such imperfections as the most accurate

and faithful narrators are liable to fall into. Others dissent from this last view. But Christians generally consider these historical books of the Old and New Testaments, and all the other books of the Bible, to be differentiated from all other literature, as being pervaded by another spirit, which is due to the fact that they are produced on the plane of revelation, and stand in a peculiar relation to the supernatural events which form its groundwork. The books of the Bible are the documents of the Christian religion, from which its facts and doctrines, and the circumstances of its origin and growth, can be correctly ascertained. Deviations from traditional theories of inspiration may be erroneous, or they may be well founded; but no man who accepts the essential truths of Christianity is to be denied the title of Christian on the ground of peculiarities of opinion on this subject.

6. The foregoing remarks naturally bring us to the important fact of the gradualness of divine revelation. Like the subsequent spread of the gospel, it was "first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear." This in-

Gradualness of Revelation.

choate, preparatory, and, in this sense, imperfect character is ascribed to the Old-Testament system, both in the Old Testament itself and in the New. The whole form of the kingdom of God in the earlier dispensation was provisional; the disclosure of God was partial and increasing; laws fell short of the absolute standard of moral duty; rites were adapted to religious feelings and to perceptions not yet mature; the type of character corresponded to the inadequate conceptions of God; the ethical and emotional expressions answered to the several stages of revelation to which they pertained. All this ought to be as familiar to readers of the Bible as the alphabet. Unhappily, it has been often overlooked by Christians, and persistently ignored by the adversaries of Christianity.

The Gospel and the Mosaic Law.

Christ contrasted his precepts with the injunctions given to them of old time. He taught that sin, and not sinners, was to be the object of abhorrence. The boundaries of love and good-will were to be co-extensive with the race of mankind. Men were to pray for their enemies. Referring to an important precept in the Mosaic

legislation, that relating to divorce, he said that it was given on account of "the hardness" of men's hearts; that is, their rude, uncivilized condition, and their moral obtuseness (Matt. xix. 8). The Mosaic law required a man who wished to be rid of his wife, to give her a written testimony which should protect her—when all women separate from a family were castaways—and enabled her to contract marriage with another man. This was a limit to the husband's arbitrary prerogative, a restraint put upon him, and so far an approach to the full recognition of her marital rights, and of the sacred character of the marriage-tie. It was a step in the right direction, and as long a step, considering the state of society then existing, as could be taken. To attempt more would have been to rush into *doctrinaire* legislation of the most impracticable character. To complain of this old divorce law, one of the various enactments by which the Hebrew wife and the Hebrew family finally attained to a position which they held in no heathen nation, and by which safeguards were set around the purity of the household,—to complain of this law is as illogi-

cal as it is for advocates of temperance to pronounce every license law immoral, when, if the law were called restrictive (as it might be), the whole force of their objection would vanish. It is not less unreasonable than it would be to complain of the civil law at present, because, while it prohibits and punishes certain forms of slander, it publishes no statute for the detection and punishment of gossip and petty defamation; as if the forbidding of one offence involved an approval of the other.

Removal of difficulties.

Now, an application of the fact of the gradualness and partialness of revelation will remove most, if not all, of the moral difficulties which are raised with regard to the Old Testament. Whoever discerns distinctly this fact—which is a perfectly manifest fact—will have gained a point of view where the major part of these difficulties disappear of themselves. Without this historical sense, without a sympathetic appreciation of the condition of mankind in the far-distant ages when the movement of revelation began, the old dispensation and the Old Testament can never be understood. Those who have no dislike for the

New Testament, but have only hard words for the Old, who can honor the heavenly Father of whom Christ speaks, but find the Jehovah of the law and the prophets repulsive, may be compared to one who relishes a ripe and juicy peach, but has no patience with the rough and bitter peach-stone from which the tree sprang.

Laws of the Old Testament.

The benign tendencies and effect of the institutions and laws of the Old Testament, when compared with the legislation of all other ancient nations, have been often demonstrated. One of the most lucid discussions of the subject, in a brief compass, is that of Professor Goldwin Smith, in his tract entitled "Does the Bible sanction American Slavery?" He justly characterizes the Old-Testament legislation as "a code of laws, the beneficence of which is equally unapproached by any code, and least of all by any Oriental code, not produced under the influence of Christianity." The purpose was not to transform society by a miracle. That is not the method of God. The Jewish code brought in no barbarous institution or custom. Its aim and result are to

reform, mitigate, and finally abolish evil usages already existing. Take the laws respecting the avenger of blood. This wild kind of justice is well-nigh universal among primitive tribes. The Old Testament did not attempt to abolish it at a stroke, but laid upon it useful restrictions. The avenger could punish no sort of homicide but wilful murder; the innocent slayer was furnished with a safe retreat; no money was to be taken in satisfaction for blood; hereditary feuds were forbidden; judges were provided in all the tribes to arbitrate between the slayer and avenger.[1] Thus a reign of law was introduced which in time must supplant, and actually did supplant, private vengeance. Take the laws relative to the right of asylum, another ancient institution existing among the Greeks and Romans, and prominent in the middle ages among the semi-civilized European nations. In old times it was a beneficent check upon lawless violence. It furnished safe retreats for the unprotected; but gross abuses always arose

[1] Num. xxxvi.; Deut. xxi. 16.

in connection with it. Superstitions about sacred places and the immunity of criminals were connected with it. The Mosaic law recognized the custom. It established six cities of refuge. But these were not for the wilful murderer. He was to be dragged from the altar.[1] The cities were not to be holy places. They were for the shelter of the sojourner as well as of the Jew. The fugitive was not compelled to stay in them forever: he might leave the asylum with impunity on the death of the high priest.[2] Look at the laws respecting paternal authority. In patriarchal society the rule of the father was supreme and absolute. It continued to be an unqualified despotism among the Romans. A Roman father had the legal right to take the lives of his wife and children. As late as the time of Seneca, Erixon, a Roman knight, put his son to death. Under the Mosaic law a mother must concur with the father in an accusation against a rebellious son. There must be a charge before "the elders,"—a solemn public proceeding.[3] Poly-

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[1] Exod. xxi. 14. [2] Num. xxxv. 26–28. [3] Deut. xxi. 18–22.

gamy prevailed in primitive times. A woman disconnected from a family was the most forlorn of beings. She was a miserable outcast. The Mosaic law did not abolish polygamy, but it alleviated its evils. If one wife was hated and another favored, still the first-born child, if it was "hers that was hated," should inherit a double portion.[1] It may be here remarked that woman among the Hebrews was never degraded as in most Oriental countries. In the decalogue, adultery and the coveting of a neighbor's wife or maid-servant were prohibited. Crimes against the purity of matron or maid were rigorously punished. Among the leaders celebrated in Hebrew story were such as Miriam and Deborah. Millenniums before the discussions of our day upon the emancipation of women Deborah was a judge in Israel. The description of a virtuous housewife in the Proverbs[2]—the woman "in whom the heart of her husband doth safely trust"—exhibits the Hebrew ideal of the wife and mother. Inhuman

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[1] Deut. xxi. 15–17.

[2] Prov. xxxi. 10–31.

as the rules of war were among the ancient Hebrews, the Mosaic legislation on this subject was for that day humane. The opportunity was to be given to a besieged city to surrender and to become tributary. The inhabitants had the option of saving their lives.[1] The Hebrews were forbidden to do as the Greeks did,—cut down the fruit-trees in a district which they invaded. If an attractive female was captured, she might be taken to wife, and then must be treated as a wife; but it was forbidden "to sell her at all for money."[2] Whoever has read Homer, or studied the Assyrian and Babylonian monuments, or even read the history of the Thirty Years' War, may be safely trusted to pronounce a judgment on the spirit and tendency of this legislation. The Jews were forced to fight in self-defence, surrounded as they were by powerful and aggressive nations. But they did not become a warlike people. War was never the great occupation; military distinction never counted for so much as was the case in other nations; and

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[1] Deut. xx. 10; Deut. xx. 19, 20. [2] Deut. xxi. 10.

there were checks upon enforced military service, as remarkable as they were beneficent.

Professor Goldwin Smith has just observations respecting monarchy among the Hebrews. Their leaders recognized the advantages of a free commonwealth, and felt it to be more consonant with their idea and function as a people. But when the people—being what they were—preferred monarchy, monarchy was allowed. But the Hebrew kings were not Oriental despots. They reigned by consent of the people. There were laws which set a limit to their prerogatives. There were fearless prophets to rebuke and denounce the proudest of them. The right of revolution was maintained. No such man as Nebuchadnezzar would have been endured by the Hebrew people.

Monarchy among the Hebrews.

Respecting Hebrew worship, Professor Goldwin Smith remarks,

"All the nations worshipped God by sacrifice and through outward forms till the mind of man had been raised high enough to worship in spirit and in truth. The Hebrew law-giver did not originate sacrificial

Hebrew Worship.

rites, but he elevated and purified them, and guarded them against the most horrible aberrations as to the nature of God, and the mode of winning his favor and averting his wrath, as all who know the history of heathen sacrifices, Eastern or Western, must perceive. The scapegoat has been and is a subject of much mockery to philosophers. Moses did not introduce that symbolic way of relieving the souls of a people from the burden of sin, and assuring them of the mercy of God; but he took care that the scapegoat should be a *goat*, and not, as at polished Athens and civilized Rome, a *man*."

The Levites were not a sacerdotal caste. They were set apart for service in the ritual by the laying-on of the hands of "the children of Israel," who were gathered in an assembly for the purpose. The right to teach was not confined to the priestly class. The prophet held a more exalted station than the priest; and one might be called, like Amos, to the prophetic office, whose occupation had been to tend sheep.

Hebrew Slavery.

Slavery has existed among all, or nearly all, uncivilized nations. It was universal among the peoples of antiquity. The lives of the inhabitants of a conquered place were

forfeited by the laws of war. They might, at the option of the captor, be reduced to slavery. Patriarchal slavery, as it is depicted in the Bible, was the mildest form of servitude. It was domestic slavery: the servant was one of the family, was a companion of the master, was brought into religious fellowship with him, and, like a feudal vassal, was armed in his defence. Slavery, as regulated by the Mosaic enactments, when compared with slavery as defined and practised under Roman law, or even among modern nations, was a humane institution. A Hebrew might become a slave voluntarily, on account of poverty, or he might be reduced to slavery as a penalty for theft. But his servitude was terminable by the satisfaction of just claims upon him, or by the recurrence of the year of jubilee, which emancipated all slaves of Hebrew extraction; and, in any event, by the expiration of six years from the time when he became a slave. His master was enjoined to treat him not as "a bond-servant," but as "an hired servant," and "not to rule over him with rigor." When his servitude came to an end, his master was forbidden

"to, let him go away empty."[1] With regard to marriage, a master might give to a Hebrew slave a non-Hebrew wife, herself a slave, for the time of his servitude; but she and her children remained with the master,—a provision which, however harsh it may appear to us, was not harsh when compared with the ordinary codes and customs of slavery. A father might, for money, dispose of his daughter; but this was with a view to her marriage, and was one branch of the *patria potestas*, the paternal prerogative. The purchase-money might be looked upon somewhat in the light of a dower. Enactments were carefully made for her protection in case she did not become a wife of the one to whom she was given, or of his son.[2] As regards non-Hebrew slaves, they might be manumitted. There were regulations for their protection and comfort, such as no other ancient nation framed. The wilful murder of a slave was visited with the same penalty as the murder of a freeman. A

[1] Exod. xxi. 2, *seq.*; Deut. xv. 12–15.

[2] Exod. xxi. 7–10.

serious injury, such as the loss of an eye or a tooth, was to be recompensed by giving the slave his liberty. Kidnapping, and the surrender of fugitive slaves flying from a heathen master, were punished. The general treatment of slaves under the Old-Testament law was gentle. The Hebrew is most emphatically commanded to be kind to the stranger, and not to maltreat or oppress him. "Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt." "For the Lord your God is a God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward. He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment. Love ye, therefore, the stranger; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt." The slave, like his master, did no work one day in seven. He partook with the family in the most solemn acts of public worship. He even took part in the family festival of the Passover. There was no policy looking to the multiplying of slaves. There were no slave-markets. Israel was never a

"slave-power" as were Athens, Rome, and other ancient states.

We may pause for a moment to advert to the attitude of Christianity toward slavery. If Christianity had made war directly on the constitution of society, had undertaken to reduce the government of Nero to a moderate and legitimate exercise of authority, had attempted to define the distinction between just service and unjust servitude,—if Christianity had attempted these things, it would have had a short stay in the world. What did the apostles do? They inculcated the golden rule. They insisted on the equality of men before God. They enjoined the exercise of justice and love. They taught that both master and slave had a Master in common, to whom both were answerable. They counselled slaves not to resist even harsh masters, but to bear their sufferings with patience and fortitude. They bade masters render to their bond-servants that which is just and equal. Paul sent back Onesimus to Philemon, no longer as a servant, but as a brother beloved. In a word, Christian ethics, or the bearings of the law

Christianity and Slavery.

of love on social relations, were not developed in all their ramifications in a moment. They were left to be brought gradually to the consciousness of Christian men, and thus to be intelligently and peacefully realized in social organization. If Christianity did not abolish slavery by an instantaneous decree, which would have been only a *brutum fulmen*, it put gunpowder under the system. For it was the influence of the gospel which eventually abolished slavery in the Roman Empire and serfdom in the Middle Ages; and it is the direct and indirect influence of Christianity which has abolished modern slavery, notwithstanding the defence of it by undiscerning or interested clergymen and churches.

Hatred of Idolatry.

We return to the Old Testament. There was one thing which the Hebrews were to regard with unsparing hatred. This was idolatry. They were the chosen people. They were chosen to be the recipients of a revelation; to form a community in which the only living and true God should be alone worshipped,—through which monotheism should be planted on the earth, and a priceless gift be prepared for all nations.

What shall be said of the extermination of the Canaanites? The moral questions involved in this topic are so grave and momentous, that, if it were to be discussed adequately, a large space would be requisite for their full treatment. But I venture upon a few observations.

Extermination of the Canaanites.

In the first place, what reason is alleged for the driving out of these tribes, and for destroying them root and branch? One reason was their unexampled vileness and impurity. Another reason was the contamination which would make association with them the ruin of the Israelites. These old Canaanite tribes were steeped in a worse than brutal sensuality. The foulest incest was not the extreme point of their pollution. With this bestiality was joined a cruelty which made human sacrifices, the flinging of children alive into the flames to appease their gods, congenial to them.[1] Many of them fled to Tyre and other Phœnician towns. From what we know of Carthage, which was settled by Canaanite worshippers

Reasons for destroying them.

[1] See Lev. xviii.

of Baal and Ashtaroth, we can get an idea of the savage rites of their idolatry. In the flourishing days of that city, hundreds of innocent boys, belonging to the best families, were thrown into the fire as a sacrifice to Moloch, the "horrid king" of the old Canaanite religion. "The land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomiteth forth its inhabitants."[1] The Israelites were warned not to follow the course of the Canaanites, "That the land spew not you out, also, as it spewed out the nations that were before you." These degraded tribes were to be rooted out, "That they teach you not to do after all these abominations, which they have done unto their gods."[2]

Israelites' sense of a mission.

In the second place, that the Israelites, animated with faith in the true God, taught to detest the unspeakable wickedness of the Canaanite tribes, considered themselves intrusted with a mission to execute God's judgment upon them, to drive them out and destroy them,

[1] Lev. xviii. 25.

[2] Deut. xx. 18.

and to make room for that true religion, of which they were the exclusive representatives on earth, is an historical fact. When they saw afterward the mischief that resulted from the influence of the remnant of the Canaanites that were left, they were confirmed in the conviction that their destruction was the just ordinance of God. They felt that a sacred obligation rested on them to sweep the ground clean.

In the third place, the beneficent results of revealed religion, the benefits which have gone forth to mankind, and appear in the Christian civilization of to-day, were contingent, as far as we can judge, on the extermination of these tribes. I shall quote here from two accomplished historical scholars, neither of whom can be accused of a lack of humane feeling, and neither of whom is wedded to traditional theological beliefs. Professor Goldwin Smith remarks on this topic of "the penal destruction of the Canaanites,"—

Beneficent results.

"Had they been spared, and reduced to slavery, the result, judging from analogy, would have been the deep corruption of the chosen people. With abundance of slave-labor, the

Jews would not have taken to industry, nor have acquired the virtues which industry alone can produce and guard. Their fate would have been like that of the Turks and other conquering hordes of the East, which, the rush of conquest once over, have sunk into mere sloth and abject sensuality. And, if the morals of the Canaanites are truly painted in the Pentateuch, the possession of such slaves would have been depraving in the highest degree."

More emphatic still are the words of Dr. Arnold:

"It is better that the wicked should be destroyed a hundred times over than that they should tempt those who are as yet innocent to join their company. Let us but think what might have been our fate, and the fate of every nation under heaven at this hour, had the sword of the Israelites done its work more sparingly. Even as it was, the small portions of the Canaanites who were left, and the nations around them, so tempted the Israelites by their idolatrous practices, that we read continually of the whole people of God turning away from his service. But had the heathen lived in the land in equal numbers, and, still more, had they intermarried largely with the Israelites, how was it possible, humanly speaking, that any sparks of the light of God's truth should have survived to the coming of Christ? Would not the Israelites have lost all their peculiar character? And, if they had retained the name of Jehovah as of their God, would they not have formed as unworthy notions of his attributes, and worshipped

him with a worship as abominable as that which the Moabites paid to Chemosh, or the Philistines to Dagon?

"But this was not to be, and therefore, the nations of Canaan were to be cut off utterly. The Israelites' sword, in its bloodiest executions, wrought a work of mercy for all the countries of the earth to the very end of the world. They seem of very small importance to us now, those perpetual contests with the Canaanites and the Midianites and the Ammonites and the Philistines, with which the Books of Joshua and Judges and Samuel are almost filled. We may half wonder that God should have interfered in such quarrels, or have changed the course of nature, in order to give one of these nations of Palestine the victory over another. But, in these contests, on the fate of one of these nations of Palestine the happiness of the human race depended. The Israelites fought not for themselves only, but for us. It might follow that they should thus be accounted the enemies of all mankind; it might be that they were tempted by their very distinctness to despise other nations: still they did God's work; still they preserved unhurt the seed of eternal life, and were the ministers of blessing to all other nations, even though they themselves failed to enjoy it."[1]

It is pertinent to remind the reader that acts occurring in recent times resembling the destruction

[1] Quoted by Stanley: "History of the Jewish Church," I., 283.

of the Canaanites have been approved, whether justly or not, by writers of high repute. Of the massacre by Cromwell at the siege of Drogheda, Carlyle says,—

"Oliver's proceedings have been the theme of much loud criticism and sibylline execration, into which it is not our plan to enter at present. Terrible surgery this; but *is* it surgery and judgment, or atrocious murder merely? That is a question which should be asked, or answered. Oliver Cromwell did believe in God's judgments, and did not believe in the rose-water plan of surgery; which, in fact, is this editor's case too. . . . An armed soldier solemnly conscious to himself that he is the soldier of God the Just,—a consciousness which it well beseems all soldiers and all men to have always,—armed soldier, terrible as Death, relentless as Doom; doing God's judgments on the enemies of God! It is a phenomenon not of a joyful nature; no, but of awful, to be looked at with pious terror and awe."

In the fourth place, as far as the effect upon the Israelites of this war of extermination is concerned, there was no wounding of sensibility. There was no such departure from the prevalent ideas and the prevalent usages of war, as would produce a moral deterioration in the Israelites

Effect on the Israelites.

themselves. Rather is it true, that, feeling themselves the deputies of the Supreme God for the infliction of righteous penalties, and for carrying out his purpose, they would perform their stern task with a kind of sacred enthusiasm, distinct from personal revenge and malice, and impressed at every step with their own exposure to a like retribution in case they should fall back into the pollutions of heathenism. An act which, though enjoined by just authority, and in its ultimate results beneficent, it might not have been possible for a people on a higher stage of moral development to perform without a hardening effect on themselves, the Israelites could do with no such consequence flowing from it.

As to the Canaanites themselves, they endured a retribution which has often been inflicted, in the ordinary course of Providence, on corrupt and enervated races, going down before the power of a more vigorous invading people. In the case before us the Supreme Ruler employed human instruments directly designated, and therefore justly empowered, for the purpose.

Analogies.

Yet on this view it may still be said with truth that the injunction to drive out the barbarian tribes took the form that it did on account of "the hardness of their hearts." Had they been more susceptible to gentler motives, less inclined themselves to sink into debasing idolatry, and had their moral sense been capable of discriminations which Christianity has made familiar, the mission given to them might have been different. It might then have been as safe for Israelites to mingle with the heathen as it was in later ages, when no seductions and no terrors could move them to take part in idolatry.

Alternative solution.

I am not satisfied that the foregoing remarks do not embrace the elements of a fair solution of the problem presented by this page of the sacred history. But if any think that this solution, in the light of the gospel, by which every thing is to be judged, is insufficient, the alternative remains to consider—not the abhorrence of idolatry, not the disposition to put far from them its orgies and pollutions—but the connected impulse to destroy and exterminate which those feelings engendered, as not inspired of God, but as a

natural impulse and emotion on that stage of moral discernment which, on the one hand, was elevated above the obtuseness of conscience out of which they had been lifted by the light of revelation, and, on the other hand, was not so far elevated above it as to enable them to think of other means of attaining the desired end. On this theory another view must be taken respecting the inspiration of these passages in the record. They must be considered as reflecting the judgment of the men of "the old time" respecting the deed of the Israelites. That deed must be held to have sprung, not from an explicit injunction, but from the dictate of a holy, yet imperfectly holy, sentiment. The espousal of this view, however, does not deprive a man of the title of Christian. Whether true or false, it can be held consistently with the belief that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Saviour of the world. This belief it is which makes a man a Christian.[1]

To sum up what I have to say here upon the Old-Testament system: It was a national religion.

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[1] Matt. xvi. 16–18; John iv. 42, vi. 69.

Without a stupendous and continuous miracle, in no other way could the true religion get a foothold on the earth. But miracle is not magic. At that time all religions were tribal. The Hebrews were organized by the act of God into a theocratic community. He assumed toward them the relation of a lawgiver. His legislation, given through prophets, extended over all matters of which government was expected to take cognizance. Idolatry was weeded out by express enactments. Apostasy from God was at once impiety and treason. Penalties were inflicted upon overt irreligion, not through the agency of natural law only, as on the broad field of the world, but through civil law, which was acknowledged to emanate directly from God. The uncivilized instincts of men were more and more curbed by wholesome enactments adapted to their condition. Increasing disclosures of the character of God purified the popular conception of him. As revelation advanced, the standard of piety and morality rose to a higher grade. Holiness came to be a word full of the most sacred meaning. Conscience was

The Old Testament system.

disciplined. Aspirations for a nearer access to God, for a wider reign of God, were awakened. A more full revelation was anticipated in the dim future. To the future the longing eyes of men were turned. At length the day came for the true religion to burst through the bonds of its political form and its external ritual. The true King, the hope of prophecy, appeared, not as the head of a single commonwealth, but as the Lord and Redeemer of mankind. Theocracy reached the ideal to which it had pointed, and toward which it had striven, from the beginning.

7. In presenting the evidences of Christianity, the facts are first to be established. The facts which are principally called in question are the miracles recorded in the Gospels. An atheist cannot credit the narrative of a miracle, for he knows of no power competent to perform one. A deist who believes in an idle deity who lets the world go on of itself, and takes little interest in the well-being of men, will distrust all testimony to miracles, be it as cogent as testimony ever can be. But a theist, whose God is a benevolent Being and pities human distress, even the distress

Miracles and Theism

of those who have wilfully forsaken him, will regard a revelation as not improbable, and miracles, a part and evidence of it, as not unlikely to occur.

Proof of miracles.

Without considering, for the present, questions relating to the authorship and date of the Gospels, it is affirmed to be impossible to account for the beginnings of Christianity, and for facts which every sensible person admits respecting Christ, his teaching, and the foundation of the Church, without allowing that miracles such as are narrated in the Gospels, including his resurrection, were actually wrought. The known fact—a fact attested by the Apostle Paul,[1] an unimpeachable witness—that the apostles themselves professed to work miracles by a power derived from Christ makes it highly probable that they believed miracles to have been wrought by him. What made them believe this, if they had not seen them? Repeated injunctions of Christ not to report his miracles are an obviously authentic part of the

[1] Gal. iii. 4; 2 Cor. xii. 12.

gospel history; and this proves that the events to which these injunctions refer actually took place. Cautions, plainly authentic, proceeding from him, addressed to his disciples, against making too much of miracles, are a proof that they were actually wrought. There is teaching of Christ, the authenticity of which cannot reasonably be disputed, which is meaningless unless certain miracles were the occasion of it. An example is the message sent to John the Baptist, when he inquired if Jesus were really the Christ (Matt. xi. 4; Luke vii. 22). Other examples are conversations of Jesus with over-rigid observers of the sabbath: they complained that he had healed the sick on that holy day. His answer on one occasion (Luke xiv. 5) implies that the healing was of a desperate malady. The charge that Jesus cast out demons by Beelzebub proves that he restored demoniacs, like the madman of Gadara, to reason and health. The resort to this imputation proves that the cures of this kind which he wrought were not parallel with any exorcisms with which the Jews were familiar. The fact that not a miracle is attributed to John the Baptist should convince one

that the miracles attributed to Jesus were really done. John was considered by the apostles inferior to none of the prophets. Why are not marvellous works connected with the accounts of him? Why are no miracles ascribed to Jesus himself before his public ministry? The later apocryphal Gospels do this, but not the Gospels of the canon. It is impossible to explain the faith of Jesus in himself as the Messiah, or the persevering faith of the disciples in him, if he wrought no miracles. Strauss called the miracles myths, growing out of the fixed expectation that the Messiah, when he should come, would do such works. How, then, could they consider Jesus the Messiah if he did not do them? To one who studies the gospel history, it is plain that miracles enter into the nexus of well-attested occurrences, and cannot be dissected out of it. The crowning miracle of Christianity—the resurrection of Jesus—is supported by proof which cannot be invalidated. Everybody who knows anything about the subject will concede that the unanimous faith of the apostles in the resurrection, as having occurred the third day after

The Miracle of the Resurrection.

his death, is the cause of the continued existence of Christianity beyond that date. Whether Christianity should survive or perish turned on that pivot. To explain that belief of the apostles, for which they were ready to lay down their lives,—that inspiring belief which raised them from the depths of despondency, and transformed them from timid fugitives to courageous heralds, going forth to confront and conquer all opposition,—to explain this belief, if it was not founded on fact, is a tough problem for scepticism to solve. The Apostle Paul, who was converted in the year 35, about five years after the crucifixion; who, three years later, spent a fortnight with Peter at Jerusalem;[1] who was conversant at the time with the testimony given by the apostles,—presents in detail the successive manifestations of Jesus to them and to the other disciples; in one instance, to five hundred at once.[2] These interviews were a definite number: they began at a certain time; they ceased altogether at a certain time. This circumstance, taken in connection with

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[1] Gal. i. 18.

[2] 1 Cor. xv. 1–18.

all the other phenomena which no candid sceptic will deny to have entered into the testimony of the apostles on this subject, excludes the theory of hallucination. Moreover, the psychological conditions which it would be necessary to assume in order to render self-delusion possible on their part were wholly wanting. They were mourning as for a lost cause. Nothing but an objective event of the most impressive character could have revived their spirit, and produced that revulsion of feeling out of which the whole subsequent history of the Christian religion sprang.[1]

Objection from fabulous miracles.

An objection to the credibility of the gospel miracles is often drawn from the fabulous miracles which abound in the records of pagan antiquity, and in the legends of the saints. The objection is plausible; but it is fallacious in logic, and is based on a superficial resemblance. The miracles of the gospel are for a higher end: they are for the purpose of revelation.

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[1] For a full discussion of the credibility of the miracles, see my work, *The Grounds of Theistic and Christian Belief.*

They mark the opening epochs in the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth. For the diffusion of that kingdom they are not required. Again, the miracles of the gospel were not wrought in coincidence with a prevailing system, and for the furtherance of it. They had not the enthusiasm of believers, and their already established faith behind them. *They created that faith, they kindled that enthusiasm.* This is a most significant difference. Moreover, the temptations to fraud in the case of ecclesiastical miracles are such as had no place when Christianity was first introduced by Christ and the apostles. The qualifications of the witnesses to mediæval and patristic marvels cannot for a moment be compared to those possessed by the disciples of Jesus. Any one may see this who will take the trouble to read the contemporary lives of St. Francis. Once more, the gospel miracles were none of them merely tentative. There were not a few instances of miraculous cure connected with numerous failures, as in the case of the Jansenist miracles, referred to by Hume. Had this been the fact, vigilant enemies would have

blazoned it abroad at once. I do not dwell on the grotesque character of the ecclesiastical miracles as a class, in comparison with the dignity of those narrated in the Gospels; nor do I touch on other points of disparity which put credulous chroniclers of antiquity and of the Middle Ages in an utterly diverse category as regards trustworthiness from that held by the founders and first teachers of the Christian religion.

Thus far I have spoken of miracles without specially considering the origin of the Gospels.

Genuineness of the Gospels.

That we have in these narratives the testimony substantially, to say the least, as it was given by the apostles, there is no valid reason to doubt. To begin with the manuscripts: The allegation that because we have not the original documents we do not know whether the copies extant are not falsified, can only come from sheer ignorance. It is impossible to account for the agreement of the manuscripts which exist, including the most ancient Uncials,—to make no account here of the minor diversities which give occasion for textual criticism,—without concluding that they

correspond to the original compositions, and to the copies in use in the lifetime of the authors.[1] It is a sufficient answer to illiterate objections of this sort, that we have better proofs of the integrity of the Gospels than of any other ancient writings. They were in use by numerous widely scattered societies. These could not have conspired, had they been so disposed, to corrupt the text. They appeared in early translations, as the Peshito, or Syrian, and the old Italic, the basis, in part, of the Vulgate. They are quoted by a body of ancient ecclesiastical authors in the East and West. It is enough to say, that, if one questions the integrity of the Gospels, he ought never to quote a line of Homer, no complete manuscript of whom is older than the thirteenth century. He ought never to cite Marcus Aurelius, or Plato, or any other heathen sage. In truth, he should never refer to ancient history; for the bulk of our information re-

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[1] For the proof in detail, see Norton's "Genuineness of the Gospels," or my article, "How the New Testament came down to us," in "Scribner's Monthly," February, 1881.

specting it is derived directly from ancient writers, whose autograph manuscripts perished long ago, and were documents concerning which we have generally far less evidence than we have respecting the writings of the New Testament.

Authorship of the Gospels.

As to the authorship of the Gospels, I will state what I believe to be the outcome of sound and impartial critical study. The second Gospel, which many now think to have been the first written, is the work of Mark, who was for a time a companion of the Apostle Peter, and, perhaps, has transferred some part of that apostle's vivacity to his pages. On the ground of a comparison of the contents of Mark and Matthew, some have contended that not quite all of the second Gospel in its present form emanated from Mark, but that a portion of the matter was, at an early day, added by some other hand. I see no good reason for this opinion. There are no traces of a proto-Mark in antiquity. The third Gospel and the Book of Acts were written by a Gentile Christian, who journeyed for a time with the Apostle Paul, and whose affirmation that he had

gathered his knowledge of the words and actions of Christ from eye-witnesses, is entitled to full credit. The first Gospel is ascribed to Matthew by the early Christian writers without dissent, although it is said to have been first written in the Hebrew language, and it is thought now to have received some additional matter from the early disciple, whoever he was, who transferred it into Greek. It existed in Greek at the date when it is spoken of by Papias, a contemporary of the Apostle John. There is internal evidence which, in my judgment, is of a most convincing character, that these three Gospels existed in their present form about A. D. 70, or when some of the apostles, and a multitude whom they had taught, were still living. The genuineness of the Gospel of John has been of late persistently, but, as I think, unsuccessfully assailed. If there are difficulties connected with the supposition of its genuineness, there are far greater difficulties attending the opposite hypothesis. Only one fact belonging to the external evidence may here be given. Irenæus, a man of unquestioned probity, Bishop of Lyons

in the latter part of the second century, by whom, as by all of his contemporaries, the fourth Gospel was received without doubt or question, had personally known in the East the martyr Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, and had heard him describe the appearance and manners of the Apostle John, whom Polycarp had personally known at Ephesus, where the apostle spent his closing years. It is morally impossible that Irenæus received a Gospel as from John which Polycarp knew nothing of, or that Polycarp could have been mistaken on a point like this.

The apostles' testimony.

When all the literary evidence is scanned, and all the collateral proofs weighed, the conclusion will be that we have presented to us in the Gospels the story which the apostles told of what they had seen and heard in their intercourse with Jesus. In these inartificial narratives the testimony of the original disciples is fairly laid before us.

The question recurs, Are the apostles to be believed? If not, shall we say that they are knaves or that they are fools? The idea of their being

knaves, who were so anxious to become "the off-scouring of all things" that they made up a lie,—made up a lie for the pleasure of dying for it,—this idea is happily obsolete. But were they fools? Were they half-crazed enthusiasts who imagined that they saw such things as the cure of the leper after the sermon on the mount, or the stopping of the bier at Nain, and the raising from the dead of the widow's son, when no such things occurred? Did Jesus, then, who is lauded as a great reformer, as one who knew human nature, a teacher of pre-eminent wisdom, select a band of fools for his chosen companions, to make up his family? And did he choose them for the express purpose of observing what he should say and do, that they might go forth and relate it to others? In what light does this theory place Christ? Turn to the narratives: were there ever stronger marks of truth? Artless, with no effort to parry objections, or anticipate cavils, the manner of the writers is that of honest men. The narrative given by the apostles is objective: they are taken up in the subject-matter; they are oblivious

Credibility of the apostles.

of the bearing of what they relate on their own repute; they tell their own faults, their own unfaithfulness to Christ, their cowardice, treachery, desertion. They set down the sharp rebukes which they received from his lips. There is no effort at concealment, nor is there any trace of exaggeration. There are none of the exclamations of wonder, none of the expletives and asseverations which belong to fictitious testimony. All is simple, unadorned, marked with the unmistakable signs of truthfulness. These are witnesses before whose eyes great and wonderful things have passed,—so great and wonderful that in the presence of them all personal considerations are lost out of sight. If the portrait which they incidentally present of Jesus in his transcendent purity and goodness—a portrait in which divine authority, and power above that of men, are strangely yet inseparably mingled with human meekness and sympathy—does not correspond to a reality which they had seen and known, then who gave to these unpractised authors, to these apostolic witnesses, destitute of artistic skill, the ability to produce such a mar-

vellous creation of fancy? If this be, indeed, their creation, let us worship them!

8. What shall be said of the objection to the credibility of the Gospels from alleged discrepancies? The first thing to be said is that the objection is irrelevant. Discrepancies and inaccuracies belong to almost all testimony. On the principle that a witness or an author is to be discredited if he fails of accuracy in all particulars, it would be impossible to believe any thing. Courts of law would have to be shut up. All books of history, including narratives written from personal observation,—much more, such as are based on them,—would be worthless. Paley, one of the ablest defenders of Christianity in the last century, justly says, "I know not a more rash or unphilosophical conduct of the understanding than to reject the substance of a story by reason of some diversity in the circumstances with which it is related. The usual character of human testimony is substantial truth under circumstantial variety. This is what the daily experience of courts of justice teaches. When

Discrepancies and Inaccuracies.

accounts of a transaction come from the mouths of different witnesses, it is seldom that it is not possible to pick out apparent or real inconsistencies between them. These inconsistencies are studiously displayed by an adverse pleader, but oftentimes with little impression upon the minds of the judges. On the contrary, a close and minute agreement induces the suspicion of confederacy and fraud." Contemporary historians, although honest and painstaking, usually fail to accord with one another in some particulars of the narrative. They may differ as regards quite important circumstances, and yet their general credibility not be shaken. The accounts of the assassination of Julius Cæsar contain numerous discrepancies; so it is with the ancient narratives of the murder of Cicero. Yet Cæsar and Cicero were killed, and the main circumstances can be well ascertained, and even minor particulars arrived at, by a comparison of authorities. Some maintain that Colonel Prescott commanded at Bunker Hill; others that General Putnam was in the chief command. However the question may be determined, or, if it cannot be determined, there

is no doubt that a conflict occurred there, and no doubt as to the essential facts. Macaulay's history of England is not made worthless because he confounded William Penn, the Quaker, with George Penn, the pardon-broker. Where variations occur in testimony, or inaccuracies in any single witness or reporter, the only question is whether they are of such a number and character as to destroy the general trustworthiness of the narrators, and to cast doubt on the substantial contents of their tale. If not, they may furnish material for a pettifogger to deal with, but they will have no weight with a discerning judge or an intelligent critic.

Applying these principles to the evangelists, we shall find that their general credibility is rather confirmed than weakened by the blemishes alleged to exist in their narratives. Method of Strauss. It is true that Strauss and critics of that stamp have tried to break down this testimony by making a parade of verbal differences, and by opposing a clause taken from one author against a clause picked out of another. It is true of Strauss, as of

many others, that he reasons often in a circle, impeaching one author on account of the statement of another whom he likewise impeaches. The method, as thus pursued, is a sophistical one, and is parallel to instances of artificial harmonizing which well-meaning but ill-judging defenders of the Gospels have sometimes resorted to in order to remove real or apparent inconsistencies. Our historian, Mr. Prescott, began to read Strauss, but soon laid aside the book on account of the false and unfair method which marks the discussion,—a method subversive of the canons of sound historical criticism.

Substantial truth of the Gospels.

Whatever opinion is entertained on the question whether the narrations in the Gospel histories admit of being reconciled in all particulars,—a question on which Christian scholars are still divided,—it can be clearly shown that in numerous instances where it has been pretended that contradictions exist, this opinion is erroneous. It must be remembered that these books are not formal histories. They are memoirs. There is no aim at completeness. They are not from the pen of expert writers. Circumstances, even very im-

portant facts, may be left out of one and recorded by another. In narratives of this character, whether oral or written, there is often an appearance of inconsistency where some additional circumstance not introduced would at once dispel this appearance. One has only to observe the narratives of daily occurrences as they are given by one's friends who are possessed of an average degree of accuracy, to discern the fallacy and unfairness of much of the adverse criticism of the Gospels. But, as I have intimated above, if no single transaction were described by any two evangelists, either in precise agreement with one another, or in precise correspondence to the facts, no inference could be drawn against the substantial truthfulness of their narratives. The fact would compel a modification of a conception of inspiration which many entertain, but would leave the essential facts in the life of Jesus, his miracles and resurrection included, untouched.

9. We leave the gospel history to glance at Christianity on the doctrinal side. Christianity is the religion of redemption. It rests on the presupposition of theism, and stands or

Redemption and Sin.

falls with it. The being of God being acknowledged, the one postulate of Christianity is the doctrine of sin. In affirming that sin is a dominating principle, or in declaring the general sinfulness of mankind, the gospel brings forward a truth made evident by the individual's personal consciousness and observation, implied in the laws, customs, languages, and literature of the world, and manifested in the entire history of the race. Christianity does not create moral evil. On this subject of human wickedness it does nothing more than reiterate what the foremost of heathen poets and philosophers have united in asserting. Seneca is as severe in the accusation which he brings against mankind as Paul, though the Stoic's moral abhorrence of the guilt which he denounces is less intense. Those who find fault with Christian teaching seldom avoid implying a prevalence of sin which they will not consent explicitly to allow. We hear them call slavery "a hideous crime," the sum of abominations. But slavery, up to a recent day, has existed almost everywhere, and in all ages. The class of oppressors who are directly responsible for

it have been strong enough and numerous enough to hold their victims in subjection. It has commonly been true that the slave has been ready, at any time, to take, when he could, the position of a master. Mankind, then, have been engaged, from the dawn of history, in the perpetration of what is termed a hideous crime. Wars of conquest are denounced as flagrantly wicked. But war has been the great business of the race, and no homage, no honors, no rewards have been so great as those bestowed on the conqueror. What are generally deemed the purest religions are charged with having incorporated into their sacred books, their creed and rites, features indicative of the direst cruelty. What must be the moral condition of a race whose theology and worship are said to be the offspring of cruel and vindictive passions? Christianity broaches no new doctrine when it teaches that moral unworthiness belongs, though in different degrees, to men in common; that evil-doing is the habit of the race, though responsibility and guilt are personal. If there be a mystery in the universality of sin, viewed in connection with personal agency

as its necessary source, and the condition, *sine quâ non*, of its guilt, it is not a mystery which the gospel originates. It inheres in the facts, which are as patent to the enlightened heathen as to the Christian, and stare every man in the face. Christianity brings out in a clear light the identity of sin as a principle, although Stoicism was not blind to this truth. Unrighteous anger is not literally murder; but it is, in a minor degree, the same evil which in murder appears full-grown. It is murder in the germ. Ambition is not avarice; but both are alike selfish. Take what specific form it may, sin is a violation of righteous law, a disregard of rightful authority, a preference of a narrow interest to the universal good. All moral obligations are so bound together that he who offends in one point is guilty of all. Law is one, and love is one, and love is the law. Christianity, as it recognizes the love of God as the first and supreme duty, traces all special forms of excessive self-love and evil-doing to the separation of man from communion with God. Here is the *fons et origo malorum*. In the void created in the human soul by the renunciation and

loss of God, all idolatries have their origin; not merely the worship of deities devised by the imagination, but the idolatry of the world,—the inordinate love of pleasure, power, fame, wealth. Ethics has the springs of its life in religion. Morality, divorced from religion, is a plant cut off from its root. It may retain its freshness and fragrance for a time; but in time it withers and perishes. This idea of the moral and spiritual life of man as having its living source in man's fellowship with God, in whom he lives, is one pervading idea of the Bible. It is a vital bond between the Old Testament and the New. It makes Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah, and all the worshippers of God in the old time, even when their ethical development was as crude and imperfect as their agriculture or architecture, of one company with John and Paul and the holiest of Christian saints. Christianity has no hope for mankind, whether as individuals or communities, except in the return of mankind to God. It looks on men who stand in no relation of affectionate loyalty to God as wasting their substance in a far country, and summons them back to the Father's house.

Christianity is for sinners. "They that are whole need no physician." He who will think earnestly enough to grasp, in its full reality, the fact of sin, is prepared at least to understand Christianity.

Communion with God is mediated and restored through Jesus Christ. He is sent to save that which was lost. He came not to fulminate a deserved sentence of condemnation; he came not to condemn, but to save the world. His function is to break down walls of separation, the separation of men from each other, the alienation of mankind from God. No work so sublime was ever undertaken on the earth. It is to form a universal society, the bond of which is love. It is to organize a spiritual community, embracing the race of man, and having its centre in himself,—a society to be trained for a future and perfect development of human nature in an immortal state. He who is to effect the re-union of man to God is himself the Son of God as well as the Son of man. There is a mysterious community of being with the Father, an inscrutable derivation distinct from that of all creaturely existences, of which the human

Person and Work of Christ.

relation of sonship is to finite apprehension the most expressive symbol. There is an incarnation, a great act of self-sacrifice. That nature of the Deity which is called, in the technical language of theology, the Trinity, is a mysterious truth. That is, it is a truth with regard to which we know *that* it is, also to a certain extent *what* it is, but not *how* it is. We know that a plant grows from the seed; we know *that* it grows, but very imperfectly *how* it grows. We know that bodies attract each other in the inverse ratio of the square of their distances. We know that a result takes place, but not in the least *how* it takes place: "attraction" is a figure of speech. So of the connection of soul and body, and of a thousand other things. So true is it that *omne exit in mysterium.* We may know that two attributes co-exist in an entity, but *how* they do or can we may be ignorant. A mysterious truth may be clear in its practical relations. It is thus with the divine sonship of Christ. Endowed with all human sensibilities, exposed to temptation, he devotes himself, in obedience to the will of God, to the task of bearing witness for him, and with an absorbing

sympathy to the work of bringing men to repentance. In the prosecution of this work his love to God and man, though always without flaw, is developed, in the experiences of life and of death, to an absolute perfection. On the cross he partakes of death, the wages of sin, and through the absolute self-devotion of sympathy attains to such a living apprehension of man's guilt and ill-desert, and of the condemnation of sin felt in the divine mind, that through the cross the communion between him, and between mankind as represented in him, and the holy and loving God, reaches its consummation. It is a communion in which there is a full, intelligent sanction, on man's side, of the justice of God in the penal allotment of death, and in his righteous displeasure at sin. Thus in Christ, as a centre, communion between God and man was restored. In the case of all who enter into the work of Christ with sympathy, which is a work done not for himself but for his fellow-men, there is a guaranty that pardon will not be mistaken for indulgence. There is a guaranty that from him will go forth upon those who give up their isolated

individuality, and seek for a new life in fellowship with him, an influence adequate not only to implant and sustain a filial allegiance to God, but to infuse into conscience a sense of his holy anger at sin, as vivid as if they had themselves been visited with the punishment due to their sins. It is not strange if there should be questions respecting the atonement which neither man nor angel can answer. To say that the atonement makes God placable is false. "He so loved the world," etc. It is no bribe to an unmerciful judge. It is not a commercial transaction, a price paid for a dispensation of pardon. It is a substitute for punishment, embracing in it certain elements of punishment itself, and doing for the satisfaction of God's own feeling, for the moral order disturbed by the violation of law, and thus for the protection of authority and the prevention of transgressions in the future, a work like that which the infliction of the curse threatened by conscience and the law would fulfil. As to the vicarious feature of the atonement, its analogies are seen wherever we look,—in families and the succession of generations, in the entailment of evils and bless-

ings, and even in material nature all around us where life springs out of death. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground, it abideth alone." The call for an unconditioned absolution, with no correlated work for the manifestation and vindication of justice, is not a call that comes up from the human soul when it is deeply penetrated with a sense of guilt. Criminals, when their consciences have been aroused, and they have been struck with the iniquity of their deeds, have preferred to suffer the penalty. When a terrible crime is committed, which spreads grief and dismay through a nation, men demand, if the perpetrator was sane and responsible, that the penalty should be inflicted in its full severity. This demand springs not merely or chiefly from a regard for public safety: it is the voice of nature asserting an eternal fitness of things. Who dare say, then, that if sin is remitted, if the transgressor is approached with offers of forgiveness, there ought not to be a corresponding revelation of the sanctities of justice? Who dare say that the process of reconciliation ought not to include something of the nature of expiation? It is easy to caricature these things.

It is easy to paint the righteous anger of God against evil-doing as a personal feeling, a passion, instead of the holy, impersonal sentiment of conscience. It is easy to represent the atonement as suffering imposed on the innocent One, when it was suffering voluntarily assumed and endured by him. There is no element in the atonement which may not be distorted by ignorance or by prejudice. Against all theoretical objections, there is the fact that millions of human beings have found in it a reconciliation to God in which nothing of his fatherly character is obscured, while the perception of the guilt and peril of sin has been increasingly deepened instead of being dulled.

Fruits of the Resurrection.

By the moral victory achieved on the cross, there was a liberation from death. When sin was expelled from human nature in the person of the Representative of mankind, who thereby stored up in himself a potency of spiritual life, of holiness and goodness, for the race of which he was the head, or the second Adam, the resurrection was a normal consequence. Set free from the limitations of space and time, while retaining

all human sympathies and the fruits of a human experience perfected on the cross, he can act from the spiritual sphere with a more wide-spread efficiency. He is the herald, the type, the author of a perfected humanity. The kingdom of God, in consequence of the glorified form of being which belongs to its head, attains to its universal stage, where there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female, and in which neither to Jerusalem nor Mount Gerizim is it needful to resort for the worship of the Father. How sublime is the progress of that kingdom!

Progress of the kingdom.

We can trace it back to the remote age when a single nomad chief, having a living faith in the true God, broke away from his home and kindred, and wandered over the hills of Palestine. We can look on it many centuries later, when it was threatened with complete destruction by colossal empires on its borders, when its narrow strip of territory was trampled down by their invading armies, when its people were deported in a mass to foreign lands to serve heathen masters, when it seemed on the verge of utter extinction, but when,

even in the darkest hours, its prophets proclaimed that it would rise from the dust, and would overspread the whole earth. We behold it in the final stage of its development, when the predicted King, with only a handful of Galilean peasants for his followers, declared that against it the powers of Hades—the powers of death and destruction which swallow up every thing earthly—should never prevail. We observe the kingdom growing as from a grain of mustard-seed, diffusing its power as leaven hidden in measures of meal, travelling from land to land, supplanting ancient religions, surviving, in full vigor, the rise and fall of nations. We open the New Testament, and find that "it breathes in every page boundless hope for the future, together with the charity which is the source of social effort, and with the faith which carries each man beyond the sensual objects of his own short life. And it closes with that splendid vision of the consummation of all Christian effort in the perfect reign of God on earth, from which folly attempts to cast, like an astrologer, the horoscope of nations; but which is in truth the last voice of Christianity, as

it passes from the hands of the apostles, and commits itself to the dark and dangerous tide of human affairs, breaking forth in the assurance of final victory." Where, save in Christianity, is there a prospect of a grand and inspiring future for man on earth? Where else is an antidote to the pessimism which creeps into the modern mind when it turns away from Christian revelation? What is there to kindle enthusiasm in Stoic or Agnostic anticipations of an approaching resolution of all things into chaos, to be followed by new cycles of development in endless and aimless succession? Say not that the kingdom of God is to be explained by a "Semitic genius for monotheism." It is an historical blunder. What was the monotheism of Assyrian and Babylonian and Phœnician, of the devotee of Baal, of Astarte, of Moloch? And Mohammedanism was the old Abrahamic theism, partly inherited and partly caught up from Judaism and a degenerate Christianity. Hebrew monotheism was no result of mere natural instinct: it won for itself a footing and a permanent life only through arduous conflict

with tendencies to polytheism and idolatry. The native Semitic tendency may be seen in the unspeakable abominations of the Chaldean ritual, which were escaped by Abraham when he left his father, who even then had begun "to worship other gods." The proposed offering-up of Isaac was not unlikely the turning-point where he cast behind him the idea of immolating human victims on the altar, one of the horrible features of worship in Babylon and Tyre.

There ought to be no need of contending for the reasonableness of the Christian doctrine of the influence of the Spirit of God upon the human soul. With the idea of a divine influence upon the minds of men heathen antiquity found no difficulty. The analogies of a quickening, elevating, renovating power, superadded to definite instruction, and going forth from person to person, are familiar. Inquiries into the relation of the Spirit's influence to the free agency of the human will are only one branch of a problem which belongs as much to philosophy as to theology. They present no greater embarrassment in the

Influence of the Spirit.

matter of religion than in connection with any other department of human agency. Arguments for fatalism, such as they are, sweep over the entire field of voluntary activity. The consistency of free will and responsibility with the efficacy of inducements is as capable of vindication when repentance and conversion are the results produced as when it is the building of a house or the marrying of a wife.

Immanence and Transcendence of God.

The Christian conception of God includes that which is positive in deism and pantheism, excluding that which is negative and one-sided. Spinoza, in his affirmations, is not so far wrong, nor is Emerson, in his essay on "The Over-soul." The difference between the deistic and pantheistic idea on the one hand, and the Christian idea on the other, is the difference between a hemisphere and a globe. For Christianity, at the same time that it teaches the immanence of God in the world, and his all-pervading energy, likewise holds fast to his transcendence. It saves thus the personality of God and the free activity of man, both of which are essential to religion,

religion being the communion of person with person. Christianity, in distinction from the religions and philosophies of heathenism, affirms creation, and denies every species of dualism, thereby consistently maintaining that God is an absolute being,—a being not depending on any thing beyond himself for the realization of his essential attributes.

Character of God.

It is impossible for the human mind to entertain a more exalted notion of the character of God than Christianity presents in the fore-front of its teaching. God is love. This is not the assertion of the Apostle John alone. Whoever thinks that Paul did not cherish a similar idea will disabuse his mind of this false impression by reading the thirteenth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians. Such is the teaching of Christ. "The bruised reed he will not break," etc. The mission of Christ is founded on the love and compassion of God toward evil-doers,—toward those inimical to him. The Old-Testament Scriptures, in which law and justice are made prominent as a pre-requisite in the moral education of man for the

gospel of forgiveness, dwell, also, on the love of God. He is "long-suffering," "plenteous in mercy," feeling toward all who revere him a father's pity for his children, "forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin." Nevertheless, throughout the Scriptures, it is a *holy* love which is predicated of God. Love is of necessity holy. Love infolds in itself hatred. It is impossible to love one thing without hating its moral opposite. He who loves the well-being of men must proportionally hate that which is fatal to man's well-being. He who is benevolent cannot avoid recoiling with abhorrence from malevolence and selfishness. That love of right is spurious the obverse side of which is not the detestation of wrong. The Great Teacher, therefore, in conformity with prophets and apostles, sets forth the righteous anger of God against sin,—a displeasure which expresses itself in the divine administration of the world. This aspect of the character of God and of his government is not a proper object for concealment or apology. From beginning to end of the Bible, he is represented as tenderly meeting every penitent, as giving a welcome

to the repenting soul like that of the father in the parable to the prodigal son who "had wasted his living among harlots." "Though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow." At the same time, toward the impenitent, who persist in trampling on sacred obligations,—obligations which bind together the moral system, as gravitation holds together the physical,—he presents himself in the character of a Judge who will "by no means clear the guilty." It is "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil," but "glory, honor, and peace to every man that worketh good." Whoever cannot endure this character, whoever wants an indiscriminate lenity or indulgence, or no divine government at all, may as well turn away from Christianity at once. He will not be able to read a page in the New Testament or the Old with any satisfaction. But, when Christianity points out the unsparing righteousness of God in the infliction of penal evil, it goes no farther than the observation of the course of things among men warrants us in believing. We see enough to make the Christian doctrine

credible. There are laws of character. Habits tend to irreversible permanence. There is a bondage under evil; and self-emancipation, or deliverance by any exterior influences, grows more and more difficult. Choice turns into a chain. Conscience cannot easily shake off the presentiment of retribution to be met with in "the undiscovered country." On this subject, Christianity teaches, in the first place, that it is necessary for any true or blessed life that man should be reconciled and re-united to God. This is a fundamental assertion; Christianity stands or falls with it. In the second place, Christianity teaches that Jesus Christ is the only means to this end, or the only Saviour. It is through him, or on the foundation of what he does and suffers, that those who have no personal knowledge of him, in case they are ever brought into relations of conscious peace and fellowship with God, are delivered. The whole family of the redeemed are to stand in connection with him. Thirdly, Christianity teaches, as a corollary to the foregoing proposition, that the final rejection of the Saviour by those to whom he

Laws of character.

is made known, leaves the soul without the hope of salvation. It is a self-evident truth, that, when there is only one means of salvation, perdition is the consequence of a persevering refusal to avail one's self of it. Such refusal is a voluntary act of self-destruction. Most Christians understand the New Testament to predict that there are those who will thus repel the approaches of mercy and help, and thus bring on themselves an endless doom,—endless from the fixity of habit, and their own irrevocable action, yet not the less penalty, since the law of habit is itself an apparatus not only of reward, but of retribution. There have been some eminent teachers of Christianity in ancient and in modern times who have dissented from the prevailing interpretation of the Scriptures. Some have thought that eventually the attractive power of God's love in the gospel will overcome all the opposition of the human will, pour light and warmth into the darkest mind, and bring to pass a universal restoration. Others, especially in later days, have believed that intimations in the New Testament, coupled with observed tendencies of sin,

justify the expectation that incorrigible souls will wear themselves out, consume their own powers of rational thought, and perish out of being. But all considerate Christians, be their opinions or doubts what they may, are bound to protest with all energy against any theory of fatalism which would attribute to sin a self-destroying character. The pantheism which makes moral evil a phase of good, a transient phenomenon that eliminates itself, is in deadly hostility to the essential spirit of the Christian religion. "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil." Sin is self-propagating, not self-consuming. He who ventures to indulge the hope of a final recovery of all souls to holiness and to God has no moral right to the Christian name, if he founds his hope on any natural necessity, or on aught save the moral operation of motives which exert over the will no coercive agency. Perhaps the day will come when controversy on this subject will be less heated, and when a more chastened curiosity will exist respecting the statistics of the future world in its far remote æons.

As concerns the problem of the theodicy, the

difficulty presented to Christian theology is precisely the same as under every other religion or philosophy in which the reality of moral evil is not denied, and in which the Power that rules the world is neither conceived of as finite, or as deficient in benevolence. Physical and moral evil are here. We see and experience them both. They are permitted to be by the Author of the universe. The reasons why they are permitted, we are for the most part left to conjecture. Since the masterly discussion of Leibnitz, the objection to the perfection of God from the existence of physical evil or suffering has been more seldom heard. On the supposition that moral evil is to exist, the existence of physical evil, where and when it is found, may be, for aught that anybody can prove to the contrary, beneficent. Moral evil or sin is purely the act of the creature. It is an abuse of freedom. It is overruled in the divine government, and turned into an occasion of multiform benefits which do not issue from its inherent tendencies, and were not designed by the evil-doer. The question why it is allowed to be introduced by

The problem of Evil.

the all-foreseeing Deity is among the mysteries of life. But the objection of Epicurus and Hume cannot logically be urged against the divine omnipotence. It can never be proved that the exclusion of sin in any of the cases where it is suffered to occur, by dint of divine power interfering to prevent it, does not involve an incompatibility in the nature of things. It can never be proved that in a universe composed of rational agents further divine interposition for the exclusion of sin might not necessarily involve a degradation of the system, a diminution of the good to result from it, greater than any advantages consequent on such interference. In other words, the permission, not the causation, of sin on the part of God may be the dictate of supreme wisdom. It is not a Christian philosophy which teaches that two and two may be five on some other planet, or that omnipotence can make a thing to be and not to be simultaneously, or achieve any other impossibilities. As long as this solution of the mystery of evil is a *possible* one, the impeachment of the divine power or goodness has no logical foundation to rest upon. It is

a subject on which all but the most presumptuous will be willing to wait for light. Meantime, Christianity stands immeasurably above the ripest heathen philosophy in ascribing sin to the self-determination of the creaturely will, instead of making it the necessary product of matter, or of any germ inherent in the constitution of things.

Protestant Christians hold the Bible to be the sufficient and authoritative rule of faith and conduct. The Scriptures are the umpire in controversies. But it is to the Scriptures collectively taken that these attributes pertain. We cannot open the Book of Leviticus, or any other book of the Old Testament, and apply forthwith a precept which falls under the eye to ourselves. We cannot select a verse in a Psalm, and adopt it, without consideration, as a sentiment suitable for a Christian to cherish. The Old Testament Scriptures are not Christian Scriptures. They belong to the earlier stages of revelation. The criterion to which every utterance, even of the most evangelical prophets, is to be brought is the teaching of Christ and his apostles. This truth derogates nothing

Character of the Bible

from the proper dignity of the Old-Testament Scriptures, nor does it clash with any reasonable idea of inspiration. It is simply an inference from the progressive character of revelation, on which I have before commented. An illustration resembling one which Whately has somewhere presented may be of service. A father corresponds with an absent son from his childhood. The earliest of these letters will naturally contain injunctions and counsels adapted to the situation, needs, and temptations peculiar to a boy. He is exhorted, perhaps, to set apart a definite hour for play, and a particular time for writing his letters. He is enjoined to retire to bed at nine o'clock in the evening. Particular regulations are laid down relative to his clothing and his expenses. The letters for a number of years are composed largely of rules of behavior, affectionately, yet imperatively, urged, and interspersed with that sort of instruction in morals and religion which would be most easily apprehended by an immature mind. At length the son arrives at the stage of manhood, and shows the moulding agency of this long-continued guidance. Then the

father addresses him as a full-grown man, and communicates to him in one final composition the principles pertaining to life, duty, and man's destiny, which he deems of the highest moment. The son collects all these letters in a volume. They all discover in different degrees his father's character, and throw light on the path of his duty. But he would be a simpleton if he referred to the earliest and latest without discrimination, and confounded the injunctions given to a school-boy with the truths and appeals of that final letter. Rather would he test every thing previous by the contents of this last communication. The illustration will mislead if it is understood to imply that the books of the Bible are to be literally described as letters from God to man. The point is simply that the progressive nature of revelation renders it necessary, as it is natural, to use the New Testament as the touchstone of the relative completeness and the continued validity of all prior biblical teaching. It requires to be further said, that, from this gradually developing nature of revelation, devotional expressions, current proverbs, and the varied expressions of a

religious and ethical character, whether verbal or in the conduct of good men, will bear upon them traces of the limit of the knowledge possessed at different epochs. There is an Old-Testament type of piety which is felt in all this literature. "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."

The critical study of the Bible, coupled with the general advance of physical and historical investigation, have brought out in recent times, in more distinct relief, what is called the "human side," or factor, in the biblical writings. Scholarly criticism tends to the conclusion that there was a growth in Hebrew institutions and laws; that the codes were kept open, the original rubrics being retained; that legislation was added, from time to time, under the guidance of prophets, to suit changing circumstances, new ordinances being looked on as Mosaic for the reason that they were conceived in the spirit and were considered a legitimate development of the primitive enactments. These questions are to be determined before the tribunal of searching and impartial scholarship.

Criticism and the Scriptures.

But they involve no such peril to the Christian faith as they are often thought to contain. The religion of the chosen people is all within the covers of the Old Testament. The debate is about the order of stratification. The organic relation of the Old Testament religion to Christianity is a historical fact which stands on indisputable proof, and is altogether independent of these critical inquiries, however important in their place they may be. Of the Scriptures as a whole, it is true that the more they are studied in the light of modern science and learning, the more striking is felt to be the apostle's declaration, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the power may be of God and not of men." The *power* remains. The treasure is more evident from the homely casket which surrounds it. Traditional formulas relative to inspiration may undergo modification: they are not an integral element of the Christian religion, but belong to the attempts of scientific thought to define it. The great Protestant principle of the normal authority of the Bible as a teacher of religion and morals remains intact. What Christianity is can

be correctly ascertained from the Scriptures, and nowhere else. The marks of inspiration are stamped even on parts of Scripture which precede contemporary authorship and testimony,—the one main criterion of historical proof. The attempted "reconciliations" of Genesis and science may not be happy, either as expositions of science or interpretations of literature; but the sublime cosmogony which stands at the threshold of the Bible, the moment it is contrasted with the ancient Semitic traditions or legends, Assyrian, Babylonian, or Phœnician, with which it has features in common, is perceived to be immeasurably elevated above them. How came polytheism and dualism to be excluded here, and not elsewhere? How did the pure theism, with its doctrine of a Creator of man in his own image, of sin as man's free act, of guilt bringing shame, of immorality and crime as flowing from practical atheism,—how did this mass of religious and moral truth, truth recognized throughout the Bible, and at the foundation of the Christian system, *get into* this Hebrew record? Who can fail to see that a Spirit was at work in the Hebrew mind not manifested

elsewhere? As the magnet attracts only true metal, so did that mind, when moved by the Spirit of God, take up only those elements of belief which were consonant with the true religion. Books in the Old Testament which are a puzzle to some Christians, and are often a theme of derision, assume an utterly different character when they are considered from what I may call the historico-theological point of view. The Song of Solomon contains—except in one passage (chap. vii. 1–9), which is an interpolation—nothing to which a pure mind can take exception. Instead of being marked by a sensual quality, as has often been asserted, it celebrates the virtue and victory of chaste love and constancy against all enticements. There is not a syllable in the Bible, from Genesis to the Apocalypse, which is adapted to foster impure passion. Those who are fond of contrasting the Old Testament with the New, as if there were a contrariety between them, must find it hard to explain how the Old Testament could have been so cherished by Christ and the apostles. Why were they not shocked by what we are told is hostile to the spirit of Christianity? It is plain

that the drift of the Old Testament is all in the right direction. The Book of Jonah—whether it be held that it was meant to be history, or was meant as a parable, like the tale of the Pharisee and the Publican, as many Christian scholars hold —contains a beautiful lesson of Jehovah's pity for the heathen, and affords a foreglimpse of the broader discovery of God's love which is made in the gospel. It is a rebuke of Jewish narrowness and harshness: it really marks an advance in revelation. The proverbs are an anthology of wise sayings by Solomon and other sages, as the Psalms are an anthology of hymns by David and other poets. They are differentiated, as I have said before, from heathen literature: another spirit dwells in them. Only they must be tested by Christianity, which is the complement of all prior revelations.

The Gospel in the form of a Servant

The gospel was brought into the world in a way to pour contempt on human pride. There is no pomp of any sort attending its advent. Humble, unlearned men are chosen for its first teachers. The Lord himself was in the

form of a servant. The New-Testament Scriptures are in keeping with the lowly circumstances that invested Christianity at its origin. They, too, from the ordinary point of view of the world, "are without form or comeliness." They are not elaborate compositions. No pains are taken to disarm prejudice, anticipate cavils and objections, frame a case all parts of which are nicely fitted together to defy attack. Attacks are expected. They are predicted. The Divine Author of Christianity has rather chosen to leave much in the Christian documents that may easily provoke disesteem and even scepticism. A test is presented of the candor, the earnestness, and, above all, of the real desire to find God, and to obtain forgiveness and peace from him.

There is room for brief observations on the ethics of Christianity. It is never to be forgotten that Christianity is in its essence a religion. Its end is a transformation of character. It aims to make man "a new creature" by connecting him with Christ, the herald, the type, and the creative potence of a perfected humanity. It incul-

The Ethics of the Gospel.

cates principles rather than specific statutes for the regulation of conduct. It is sometimes said that the golden rule is not peculiar to the gospel. As found in Isocrates, Confucius, the Rabbis, and in other authors where it is alleged to occur, it appears either in a negative form, "Do not unto others," etc.; or in some restricted application, as to the relation of husbands, fathers, or children. In the gospel it stands in a form at once affirmative and universal. But, even if an equivalent injunction were to be met with elsewhere, it would be more pertinent to show where, save in Christianity, there has been provided an efficient motive and inspiration to its fulfilment. Moreover, this precept is far from being an adequate guide of life, when severed from the Christian truth connected with it. The rule to treat others as we should wish to be treated ourselves, or even as we should think it right for others to treat us, requires as its complement a true idea of man as he ought to be. We must know in what man's well-being consists. What ought we to desire at the hands of others? The golden rule is simply to brace men up on the weak side. It is

to counteract the bias of self-love, the most prolific source of injustice and unkindness. This is the limit of its function. It is one of those parts of New Testament teaching which the natural conscience sanctions, if it fails to suggest.

The New Testament insists on general affections. It lays stress on philanthropy, because at that age there was no need to exhort men to patriotism. The tendency was to make love of country the acme of virtuous attainment. But Christianity never disparages particular affections, such as bind men together in families and communities. It simply guards against their exaggeration, and insists on a benevolence as broad as humanity.

Patriotism.

It is a narrow and frigid method of interpretation which finds in the sermon on the mount a universal prohibition of the use of force. The precept of non-resistance is like that—which is a branch of it—enjoining that if a man is sued for his coat he is to give, unasked, his cloak also. In all such precepts the thing forbidden is malice and revenge. The thing commanded, as the

The use of force.

main reliance for the overcoming of evil, is the practice of forbearance and kindness. But the state, as an organization of force, existing by divine authority for the maintenance of justice, is sanctioned by Christ and the apostles. Nor does the spirit of Christianity forbid the use of force for ends consonant with those for which the civil authority is established. The limit to the duty of civil obedience is where human law is in direct conflict with the divine. Then a Christian is to obey God rather than man. To conclude that there is an obligation of passive obedience in all conceivable cases, and no right of revolution, is an unwarrantable inference from injunctions given at a time when armed resistance to tyranny would have been a suicidal folly, and directed to those charged with a special mission to found, by persuasion and by patient suffering, the new kingdom of God among men.

10. The relation of Christianity to ethnic religions and to philosophy among the heathen is not that of unqualified repugnance. The "wild-growing religions," as Schelling calls them, may have in them important elements of

The heathen religions.

truth. These are found in their right place in the Christian system. In one religion, the teaching of Buddha, there is an impressive inculcation of sympathy and philanthropy. It is linked with a gloomy metaphysic which places the highest hope of the soul in the annihilation of personal being. That system, in its proper consequences, is fatal to responsibility as well as to hope. All that is good in Buddhism is found in the gospel, without its dismal accompaniment of atheism and the drowning of personality in a fathomless ocean of being. How infinitely richer is the good offered to the wretched victims of caste in the invitation of Jesus, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest,"—words which Augustine says he had never found in Plato, high as he rated the charms of that prince of philosophers. Whatever in Greek philosophy or the uninspired sages of other peoples is true to human nature, Christianity welcomes as congenial with itself, and knows how to assimilate. Orthodox fathers of the ancient Church did not hesitate to say that rays of light from above had fallen into the minds of

Socrates and other masters of wisdom, who rose into a higher atmosphere than was breathed by the generations among whom their lot was cast,—men of whom it might be said that heathen society "was not worthy." Stoicism yearned for a universal polity. As the ancient states, one after another, fell to pieces, there were those who aspired after a broader and permanent bond of union. Cicero, in a strain caught from those teachers, discourses of a universal "commonwealth" of gods and men. These were aspirations which could never be realized on the soil of heathen antiquity. They were dreams awaiting a fulfilment. They were unconscious prophecies of the brotherhood of mankind, secured in the fellowship of Jesus Christ, and of the Church opening its doors to every nation and every rank.

Christianity and Society.

It is, likewise, a part of the genius of Christianity to foster, within its due limit, every genuine expression of human nature, to encourage the development of the human mind, and the promotion of human welfare in all directions. Christianity seeks to mould society according to

justice and love. It seeks to infuse into government and legislation the spirit of equity. It favors education and culture, because it values the human soul infinitely above every exterior good. It is friendly to art, for the love of beauty is allied to the love of goodness. Whatever inventions and discoveries lighten the burden of labor, minister to the healing of the sick, and heighten the comforts of daily existence, are welcomed by the followers of him who went about doing good. Christianity is not an ascetic system. The kingdom of God on earth is not a ghostly community, busied exclusively with religious exercises. It is humanity developed, trained, perfected on every side. Christian virtue is no "fugitive and cloistered virtue." "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report," Christians are exhorted to pay regard to. The comprehensive command of Christ is, "Be ye perfect." Perfection is reached in the disciple as in Christ, not by "minding his own things," but "the things of others." To live and

labor for the world without worldliness—that is, subordinating all material good to that which is spiritual and walking by faith in things not seen—is a Christian's work.

Need of the hopes of the Gospel.

Let a thoughtful man contemplate the prospects of mankind on the supposition that the Christian faith is to pass away. Civilization advances. Human science goes forward as far as it can in alleviating bodily pain. Provisions for living comfortably are multiplied in a degree at present incalculable, and are diffused abroad. Knowledge increases more and more. Wars come to an end. Governments become equitable and beneficent. Manners take on a finer quality. Conceive that such a progress of mankind is possible, apart from the purifying and restraining influence of religion,—an expectation for which neither human nature nor experience affords the slightest warrant,—what then? Are men who are thus advanced in the intellectual scale and in the affections of the heart to be satisfied with a merely mundane existence? Can they content themselves

to live in this way with no wider horizon, and then to pass out of being? Will they find a sufficient stimulus to labor for their race in the mere hope of rendering the earth a more comfortable abode for tenants who in swift succession rise into being and sink into the grave, as flowers blossom and the next day fall from their stems? The further civilization advances, were a sure advance practicable without the inspiration and the safeguards of religion, the more intolerable human life would become. Man would be less happy than the animals. The brutes have no thoughts or imaginations above the necessities of the hour; but man, with a nature too large to be satisfied with earthly good, is cut off from any thing higher. The dignity of life, and its joy not less, are gone when there are no ties connecting this brief existence with a world unseen.

I have spoken of Christianity, making no effort to confute atheism. It is no part of my plan to set forth the evidences of the being of God. He reveals himself in the constitution of the human soul, a free intelligence, which

The being of God.

cannot explain itself to itself by any material causes among which freedom has no place and intelligence does not exist. He reveals himself in conscience, through which an imperative law is imposed on us, which is superior to the human will and independent of it. He reveals himself in the order and design which render science possible, and which bring home to the unperverted mind the conviction that the world is framed and sustained by an intelligent Creator. He reveals himself in the course of history, in the working out of ends by the concurrence of numberless instruments, neither of whom comprehends the plan which he takes part in executing, and in the traces of a righteous government which, amid all the confusion of human affairs, are clearly discerned, and which excite a rational presentiment of a more complete manifestation of justice hereafter. Nothing can be more irrational than criticism of the justice and goodness of the First Cause of all things; for that there is a First Cause few reasoners are so unphilosophical as to call in question. The Author of the universe is the author of the human faculties by

which we judge of truth and falsehood, of good and evil. If he is not righteous, what reason have we to trust the faculties which he has given us? What ground have we to rely on any conclusion? and, if not on any conclusion, how can we put confidence in impressions that we may have in regard to the Creator's attributes? Faith in God is the presupposition of faith in our own intellectual processes.

Christianity and sects.

In the foregoing discussion I have endeavored to state the opinions of Christians correctly, wherever I have professed to refer to general or prevailing beliefs. In other cases I have expressed frankly my personal convictions. Christianity is the peculiar property of no individual and of no single sect. Whoever defends it or assails it has no right to confound peculiarities of doctrine found here or there among Christians, or even widely prevalent, with the catholic faith, or that great substance of belief which Christians generally unite in cherishing. I have passed in rapid review a series of topics, to either of which a volume might well be devoted. If the effect is

to give to any disbeliever or doubter a more enlightened conception of the religion of Christ, and to diminish prejudices which often spring from incorrect teaching, I shall feel that I have not written in vain. Should any one be moved to controvert statements in the preceding pages, I shall not, partly for the reasons stated at the outset, feel obliged to make reply. I have no fear that candid readers will infer from my silence that the propositions which have been stated above admit of no further defence.

THE END.

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